NATIVISM OR UNIVERSALISM: SITUATING LGBT DISCOURSE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Despite or precisely because of the fact that it is being increasingly globally invoked, the LGBT signifier bids us to understand its discursive performances in various localities, particularly in the global south, whose conservative traditions this form of politics most visibly challenges, at the same time that it can only do so translationally—which is to say, as a form of transcultural syncretism. More specifically, this paper offers a postcolonial reading of LGBT discourse in the Philippines, examining the confluence between the discourse of Western "psychospirituality" and the local idiom of interiority (kalooban), as evinced, in particular, in the minoritized identity of the bakla. This conceptual history concludes with the proffering of a theoretical argument about the usefulness of a moderate nativist perspective, that allows for the inclusion of hybridity in the analysis of heteronormative sexual and gendered constructions in sites outside the sexological tradition from which they originally arose.

Keywords

bakla, transgender, postcolonial homosexuality

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Trans Politics

THE LATEST ELECTORAL EXERCISE in the University of the Philippines Diliman[1] resulted in something inaugural: Gabriel Diño, the standard bearer of the moderate Alyansa party, won the presidency of the Central Student Council for the school year 2012-2013.

A magna cum laude graduate and student in MS Mathematics, Diño bested three other candidates, on a platform of transparency, gender equality, and non-tolerance for fraternity-related violence (Aurelio). These issues are hardly unique to this candidate's program of governance, however, and indeed what distinguished this victory in the end is also what bedeviled it: the fact that Diño, who goes by the feminine-coded, pop-culture name "Heart,"[2] publicly identifies herself as a "transgender." This is a self-identification that her rivals and detractors attacked, for it supposedly mystified her qualifications, and reduced the entire campaign to the espousal of exotic difference, to the neglect of more important things, like track record and credentials.

Transgender, of course, is the "T" being referenced in the acronym "LGBT," the signifier for a coalition of variant and non-heteronormative identities, that has been operating in both the local and national political spheres in the Philippines over the last decade and a half. It signifies a transitivity between genders[3]—from male to female, or from female to male—and it has been adopted by educated and political-minded Filipinos who identify with the gender of the opposite, genital sex. The discourse of transgenderism may therefore be seen as relatively recent in Philippine culture,[4] even as what it denotes—effeminacy, male femininity, cross-dressing, cross-gender behavior, and the like—is nothing if not entirely familiar. In fact, most Filipinos know them by that all-too-familiar word, and the all-too-familiar image of an all-too-familiar person that that word signifies. The word, of course, is none other than *bakla*.[5]

In a TV interview, Diño in fact talked about her bakla childhood and early adolescence, which had been particularly difficult, since they mostly unfolded in an all-boys, Catholic school (David). Her experience of having to hide from her mother and overseas-employed father her early attempts at cross-dressing is, to be sure, not an atypical one. What's interesting is that, from the way she understands it, "bakla" and "transgender" are not, in her own experience, mutually exclusive terms. The difference between them is that while the former was an undesirable ascription—hurled hurtfully at her in the playground, for example—the latter is a positive, maturely chosen, and self-arrogated label, that denotes an affirmative cross-gendered identity that she most definitely prefers.

To the degree that Diño may be called bakla—a category which she recognizes to still be constitutive, even if only as the repudiated residue, of her identity—then we can say that her victory is hardly ground-breaking: a decade and a half ago, another outspoken bakla, who preferred to be called gay, Percival Cendaña, had already

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won his year's CSC elections.[6] Cendaña, however, was at best merely effeminate, and did not cross-identify or present himself as feminine in the least.

Already, with these two examples of contemporary *kabaklaan* (loosely: "gayness")—of the "gay" Cendaña and the "transgender" Diño—we can more or less get a picture of the situation of Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender discourse in the Philippines: it represents a global politics that has come to be embraced and championed by certain groups and individuals, precisely because of its global rhetorical force—a force that has been transforming attitudes across even the most traditional and conservative societies, if only because it is enabled by the globally efficacious fiction of human rights.

Necessarily, however, LGBT discourse has to confront, dialogue and/or converge with the existing discourse of gender and sexuality in the Philippines, which is variably heteronormative in the sense that it privileges the male/female dualism, while at the same time making precarious room for the gender-transitive identities of the tomboy and the bakla. Indeed, the all-too-familiar "round" sung and heard in many Filipino childhoods—"girl-boy-bakla-tomboy"—may very well express Philippine culture's hierarchical genders, with the first two functioning as the norms, of which the last two are "inferior" derivatives.[7]

Diño's critics faulted her for capitalizing on her gender, but what they all too predictably forgot is that, on one hand, she couldn't very well have presented herself as genderless, and on the other, gender difference was also the very ground on which the other candidates inexorably stood. In other words, could Diño have really played down her gender identity, given that gender is an inescapable dimension—the irreducible condition—of all identity? After all, everybody else who ran in the elections certainly unthinkingly operated in/through "engenderment," performing as they did their gendered selfhoods that, admittedly, precisely because they referenced heterosexuality, sought to erase their own status as performative.[8] One genitally male candidate (dressed confidently in recognizably masculine-coded clothes) shamelessly serenaded voters in a female dormitory. Another femininely attired candidate loudly asserted the superiority of her female genitality, dissing and maligning the "inauthentic" Diño in the process.

Gender is the condition through which we become subjects, and the supposed "exceptionalism" of Diño as a transgender candidate is simply the radical difference of her ex-centric self-identification—a radical difference she did not disavow (for indeed why or how could she have?), even as the trouble and/or anxiety it evokes derives from its power to unmask and denaturalize gender as ontologically groundless. Which is to say: like all self-conscious displays it dramatizes the point that, far from being foundational, gender is merely the ritual invocation, through repetition, of regulative fictions of embodied selfhood.

The naturalization of the hetero norm makes it difficult to imagine that hetero subjects are anxiously performing their genders (and their identities) into being, precisely by repetitively performing them. Transgendered subjects, on the other

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hand, in whom the calculus of genital sex and normative gender does not align, can only be perceived as performing or "enacting" their identity. And yet, come to think of it, Diño couldn't have campaigned except as her transgendered self, and it's only because her "self" is gender-variant that some people in the University of the Philippines could think of it as exceptional—which is to say, as especially "performative." The truth is, all this has simply been the everyday expression or embodiment of gender from her point of view, and it isn't any different from the more regular gender performances by regular men and women—performances which are, in truth, just as if not even more spectacular (think of the garden-variety macho man, inclined towards a form of blustery and swaggering bulkiness, for example, that must be difficult to maintain and is really as painstakingly performed on a daily corporeal basis as a transwoman's daily embodiment). It's quite possible that Diño understood—at least subconsciously—this "theatrical" quality of all gender "play," and so incorporated and embraced it as part of her politics, even as for many observers it could (and did) overshadow the fact that she possessed all the qualifications (and the record of efficient and devoted service) to deserve the post that she thankfully ended up winning.

A Short History of Homo/sexuality in the Philippines

The painful difficulty of explaining these nuances, these "differences" between local and global concepts, can be partly assuaged by unpacking the notions of same-sexual and gender-transitive behaviors and identities in our culture—notions which have had, admittedly, a long and complex history. While the arrival of LGBT politics would appear to simplify the situation—by specifying and denominating these internationally recognizable "minority identities"—upon closer inspection we can see that it has, quite possibly, only served to complicate things even more.

To historicize LGBT discourse in the Philippines, we begin by historicizing the discourse of homosexuality, which it presupposes. And in order to do this, we need to, first of all, recognize the difference between gender and sexuality.[9]

To be specific, we need to denaturalize the "commonsensical" connection between the gender-transitive behaviors and identities of the *bakla, bayot, agi, bantut*, etc.[10] and the discourse (and reality) of homosexuality as a question of same-sexual orientation and/or identity.

Suffice it to say that—going by the available historical accounts—the phenomenon of "gender transitivity" permeates the oral past not only of the Philippines but also the whole of Southeast Asia.[11] By contrast, homosexuality is obviously a more recent development, an "implantation" of the American-sponsored *biomedicalization* of local cultures in the Philippines.

We know, looking at the extant documents, that from the earliest encounters between the Spanish and the natives, gender-crossing was already very much a

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reality in a number of communities across the entire archipelago.[12] Local men dressed up as—and acting like—women were called, among others, *bayoguin, bayok, agi-ngin, asog, bido,* and *binabae*. The Spanish thought them remarkable not only because they effectively transitioned from male to female, but also because as spiritual intermediaries or *babaylan*, they were revered figures of authority in their respective communities.[13] It's important to remember that their taking on the customary clothes of women—as well as their engagement in feminine work—was of a piece with a bigger and more basic transformation, one that redefined their gender almost completely as female. More than mere cross-dressers, these "men" were gender-crossers,[14] for they didn't merely assume the form and behavior of women. Their culture precisely granted them social and symbolic recognition as *binabae* ("womanlike").

According to various *cronicas y relaciones*, they were "married" to men, who became their *maridos* ("husbands"), with whom they indulged in regular sexual congress. What we must realize, however, is that the gender-crosser enjoyed a comparatively "esteemed" status in precolonial Philippine society primarily because women enjoyed a similar—or an even "higher"—status, as well. When the Spanish arrived, the *mujeres indigenas* were the priestesses and matriarchs, who could name their own children, divorce their husbands, own their own property, and accumulate their own wealth.[15]

Needless to say, with the passing of the centuries, gender-crossing (in the traditional sense) became more and more difficult to successfully "enact." Along with the degradation of the status of native women, the gender-crosser herself progressively suffered from the ridicule and scorn which only the Spanish brand of medieval Mediterranean machismo could inflict. No longer likened to a naturally occurring species of bamboo called *bayog*,[16] the native feminine man (*bayoguin*) in the Tagalog regions of Luzon slowly but surely transmogrified into *bakla*, a word which had originally meant "confused" and/or "cowardly."[17] Needless to say, kabaklaan isn't a natural (or predestined) state any more, but is rather merely a temporary condition from which the bakla himself might conceivably be ejected—using whatever "persuasive" means.

Nonetheless, we can safely say that during the Spanish period, cross-dressing, effeminacy, and gender-transitive behavior in general persisted in the Philippines. They persisted not as themselves, however, since they were syncretized and transformed across the Hispanized centuries, morphing into a variety of distinct, colonial, and postcolonial practices. (For example, judging by the existence of "folksy" jokes that willfully confuse priestly vestments with feminine dress, the colonized *indios* would appear to have continued to equate the religious office with effeminacy).[18]

The American period, on the other hand, saw the promulgation of modern notions of gender and sexuality by means of the public educational system (and the instruction in English that it deployed), and the Americanization of all aspects

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of government and the mass media. This discursive regulation in and through the imposition of American culture inaugurated a specific "sexological consciousness" in the Philippines—one that was premised upon a psychological style of reasoning that was hitherto unknown.

We must remember that what facilitated the colonial "sexualization" of the bakla is the presence, in the native culture, of a discourse of valorized interiority or "transcendent depth," to which the colonial notion of gendered psychosexuality came to readily append itself. Among the Tagalog, this is the discourse of *kalooban*.[19] This conceptual process entails the discursive movement away from the genitally sexed "external body" (*labas*) towards the realm of the psyche and interior selfhood (*loob*), and what's important to remember is that it did not completely negate or eliminate the importance of the former, but rather, merely casts both in a reverse and mutually exclusive relationship. This binarism effectively absolutizes their difference from one another, effectively recasting the bakla's identity into a perversion (which is to say, a "self-contradiction").

Moreover, it's important to realize that this binarism was premised on another binary—the dichotomizing of the gendered body into practically anatomically immutable and mutually exclusive male and female normative "types." This dimorphism is arguably colonial, as well, inasmuch as there is archival evidence to suggest that a number of pre-Hispanic cultures in the Philippines recognized the existence of "mixed," "liminal," and/or "alternative" bodies. From all available accounts, it would appear that, even during early colonial times, the male/female dualism did not exhaust all the possible "somatizations" of the gendered self the various Philippine indios could assume.[20]

The sexological discourse of homosexuality (as a psychosexual inversion) proved easy enough to "graft" on to kabaklaan because of the equivalency or "comparability" that exists between the Western concept of the gendered inner self, and the capaciously generative concept of loob. This "sexualization" of local modes of mentality, behavior, and personality, was the inevitable result of the implementation of an English-based education system (Lagmay 163-80) and presumably, the "psychosexual logic" it introduced has prospered and become more stubbornly entrenched since then. It's quite likely, hence, that the consciousness of many young Filipinos of today has been formed by levels—indeed, by intensities—of sexual self-awareness that were unheard of in the past.

In other words, over the past one hundred years, by virtue of American colonialism and neocolonialism, Filipinos have been increasingly socialized in Western modes of gender and sexual identity formation, courtesy of a sexualization that rode on a variety of biomedical discourses (like public hygiene, guidance and counseling, psychology, feminism, even AIDS). This has resulted in the entrenchment of the "homo/hetero" dichotomy as the key organizing principle in the now-heavily-freighted sexual lives of educated Filipinos, especially those living in the large urban centers where Westernized knowledge hold sway. Obviously, it

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is to these selfsame (neo)colonial processes that we owe the reality of local LGBT politics and identities.

And so, by virtue of the Philippines's (neo)colonial modernity, the effeminate bakla became the "homosexual": on one hand, a genitally male man whose identity is primarily defined as a function of his sexual desire for other men, and on the other, by virtue precisely of this "inverted" orientation, a (homosexual) man whose psychosexual identification tends towards the female. What we need to remember is that while his residual "transgenderal" characteristics (meaning, his effeminacy and/or transvestism) locate him somewhere along the continuum of "gender-variant" performativities within the Philippines's much riven history, the bakla remains quite distinct by virtue of the following fact: he is burdened not only by his gender self-presentation, but also, and more tragically, by his "sexual orientation," a biomedical ascription capable of defining who he is, as a matter of deep psychological being, as an innermost question of self.

It's crucial, however, that we understand the following: even while a "confessional" discourse of "unnatural" acts—sodomy—existed in the Philippines during the Spanish period, such acts were nevertheless deemed temporary and conquerable, a moral weakness to which anyone mortal was, every now and then, susceptible. Indeed, sodomy was not a discourse of identity at all, but was, rather, quite strictly a discourse of acts—non-procreative, non-conjugal, and non-missionary acts between men and women (and, every so often, also animals).[21] Even so, the gender-crosser's sexual attraction towards—and acts of sexual intimacy with—the indio men he might have been "married" to simply attended (and did not cause) her redefined status as "womanlike."[22] This status denoted what was more properly a gendered rather than a sexualized form of social being.

The various *confesionarios* that were printed and used with great zeal by the Spanish remind us that, as is conceivably the case elsewhere in Southeast Asia, sketching out the history of "same-sexual"—at least, genitally speaking—behavior between genital males in these islands will necessarily implicate effeminacy (and even perhaps transgenderism), but the latter cannot adequately explain—actually, cannot even remotely exhaust—the reality of the former. In colonial times (as now), male same-sexual behavior in these various societies has probably described a difficult and dissimulated continuum of intra-male bonds. Hence, the varying degrees, qualities, and "embodiments" of effeminacy and/or "male femininity" to be found across the different periods of Philippine history may or may not be taken as constituting a portion—understandably much reviled and disavowed, in more recent times—of this very same continuum.

In attempting to trace the history of male homosexual activity in the Philippines, we will therefore need to consider not just the gender-transitive but also the "masculine" side of the divide. Easily we realize that we cannot be sure about the exact prevalence (and quality) of genitally male "same-sex" encounters in early colonial Philippines, going by the history of effeminacy alone. Genital males other

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than the gender-crossers were perfectly capable of engaging in sex with each other (which is to say, with other males), and this "capability" went largely unchecked in the Spanish accounts. Solely for this reason, we cannot equate the history of homosexuality with that of effeminacy or transgenderism at all, short of falling into historical error.

Of course, we also face the bitter realization that piecing together this more "comprehensive" kind of history (of sexual acts) will be next to impossible, inasmuch as the "regularness" of even just those males who had sex with the gender-crossers precisely spared them from the ignominious honor of being written about and described in the archives—what more the rest of the "unremarkable" male population. All that we can plausibly say, therefore, is that the "absence" of such accounts in our historical narratives will always confound any confident claims regarding the incidence of homosexuality during colonial times. To limit its occurrence to the gender-crossers and/or even just their partners would be to deny the existence of those exclusively male bonds that were strikingly comparable to same-sexual intimacy itself (even in the strict sense of genital contact), and yet, precisely because they conveniently fell under the various structures of officially sanctioned male homosocial relationships[23]—friendship, rivalry, initiation, solidarity, fraternity, etc.—this resemblance largely passed unnoticed then (and yes, it continues to pass unnoticed today).

In any case, aside from coping with the onus of being "feminized," the bakla nowadays also must grapple with the personal demons of pathological self-loathing—primarily on account of his "sick" orientation. Nonetheless, there are many encouraging narratives that the stigmatizing of the bakla into and as a homosexual has engendered, and these are the narratives of cultural hybridity and appropriation, which may also be read (using a different kind of political optic) as narratives of postcolonial resistance. This form of resistance isn't transitive—isn't volitional—but actually inheres structurally in the dynamic between the local and the translocal itself, and we find evidence of it from both the colonial and postcolonial (chronologically speaking) periods of Philippine history, demonstrating the deformation, through translation, of colonial norms. More specifically, we can say that these narratives include LGBT activism itself, which—as Filipinos espouse and practice it—is certainly not reducible to the same political "thing" that it arguably is, elsewhere in the globalized world.

While we must accept the fact that it was the American sexological regime that pathologized Filipino LGBTs in the first place, as the present-day example of increasingly politicized Filipino gays, lesbians, and transgenders illustrate, we must also recognize that it was precisely this very stigma that paradoxically enabled them as well, in all sorts of interesting and unpredictable—and, possibly, even ironically "anticolonial"—ways.

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Constructionism and "Moderate Nativism"

At the end of this short conceptual history, I wish to hark back to the title of my presentation, which pertains to the theoretical premise behind this short "narrativizing" of gender and sexual concepts that I have just performed. I am, of course, referring to the epistemological crisis that attends the study of gender and sexuality, which may be summarized as the conflict between seeing them as natural, transcultural and transhistorical realities on one hand, and seeing them as constructions of specific social and historical processes—the discursive effects of very specific, modern, sexological conditions—on the other.[24]

Needless to say, the idea of a "conceptual history" for homosexuality already implies constructionism, and indeed that's the framework implicitly followed by the accounting I've just made: the bottom line is that sexual and gender identities are discursive impositions and/or cultural accomplishments. This means that our identifications, our sense of who or what we are, are cultural and historically mutable facts, being in fact merely the discursive products of acculturation, conditioning, and the concepts made available by our society's knowledge system—the categories available for understanding ourselves. Thus, even when in different cultures and histories individuals may be seen to engage in same-sexual sex acts, nevertheless these acts are not understood in the same way. Sexual orientation, gender, and identity itself are not simple empirical categories, but rather the effects of cultural and historical processes of naming, identification, and regulation. As such, they need to be historicized and examined critically in order to be fully understood.

In the context of the Philippines, we can reframe this debate as being one between "particularist" accounts on one hand, and "universalist" accounts, on the other. In my own work, I have referred to this as the "controversy" between nativism and universalism.[25] What this means is that, right at the outset, I've needed to ask the following: because LGBT discourse signifies forms of gendered sexuality that originate historically in the West, what should one's critical attitude be toward its appearance in a neocolony like the Philippines?

There are two possible positions on this issue: one may be called universalist, and the other nativist. Obviously, the universalist (and positivist) orientation of Western biomedicine cannot be assumed at all, going by specificity of the homo/hetero logic (that classifies people on the basis of the gender of their sexual object choice), as well as by the variety of alternative sexual and gender systems—the sheer multiplicity of meanings—across cultures and histories. On the other hand, the nativist position will insist that even though the Western terms "homo-" and "heterosexual" are being used by Filipinos in the Philippines to refer to their own forms of erotic desire, these labels remain vague and problematic, and cannot properly be made to represent the core of their conception of sex, as well as their very own sexual self-understandings. Hence, this position either categorically

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denies the possibility—or at least qualifies the point—that sexual orientation exists as a form of experience among Filipinos.

In other words, the former position describes an extreme form of nativism. What it primarily does is to insist that even as the labels of sexuality and the discourse producing them actually occur in Philippine society, they do not accurately depict or capture the native subject's comprehension of the realities of the sexual acts he or she engages in. Hence, this position assumes that despite colonization, something that may be called an "indigenous consciousness and selfhood" remains clearly intact and untouched by the colonial models of subjectivity. Obviously, this position is untenable, given as it is to the kinds of nationalist essentializing and nativist myth-making that simply can't hold up to critical scrutiny.

The more moderate or strategic form of nativism, on the other hand, is what I chose to deploy in the foregoing history. This choice resonates with recent postcolonial attempts—for instance, most memorably, Benita Parry's[26]—to complicate the question of nativism, and not to cursorily reject it as a "delusional, mythmaking movement" that is typically promoted and espoused by institutional nationalists in the Global South, which seeks to posit the existence of a pure and precolonial nature or "essence," in the name of anticolonial resistance and national liberation. Defined this way, nativism is said to approximate ethnonationalism, and just like it, it simply cannot hold up to theoretical scrutiny, being premised upon an easily dismantled fiction or myth of indigeneity and/or cultural singularity. By contrast, my "moderately nativist" argument here makes no such "purist" or mystical claims, and instead proposes that Western conceptions of sexuality may be demonstrated to be present among Filipinos only to a degree (meaning, only in mixed, translated, or syncretic forms), and only along some distinct lines (socioeconomic, for instance) of a kind of "cultural divide." Thus, while the extreme nativist will say that the homo/hetero forms of sexuality, as colonial impositions, remain alien and inapplicable to the Philippines, the moderate nativist will hypothesize that they are applicable, but only as hybrid forms, and only within certain limits—as, say, among the elite or middle-class urban dwellers. This is a strategic deployment of the nativist term that immediately taps into the notion of postcolonial resistance while at the same time qualifying what it means by demurring against its simplistic interpretation as a self-defeating and colonially indentured form of "reverse essentialism."

Thus, going by this perspective, when I speak of the dialogue between the Tagalog-Filipino's discourse of interiority (or *kalooban*) and Western psychology, that may be seen to exist in the identity of the contemporary homosexualized bakla, and when I speak of LGBT identities in the Philippines, I mean that these are realities already to be found within it, by virtue of neocolonial modernity. That I continue to ground my analysis in a specific milieu, in any case, qualifies my approach as still somewhat nativist (or at the very least "localist"), although it is an approach that will not deny the presence of Western cultural hegemony and the colonial constitution of subjectivity.

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This "moderate nativist" perspective also bids me to consider the persistence of residual indigenous valuations of gender that modify—that is to say, syncretize—the newly implanted sexual order. Once again, we can say that in the Philippines today bakla signifies a culturally hybrid or syncretic notion that incorporates both local and translocal conceptions of gender transitivity and *homo* or "same" sexuality. Thus, despite the modernizing ideologies of gender and sexuality, it continues to preserve, within itself, residues of its "prehomosexual" past—for instance, the notion that kabaklaan is simply a matter of "confusion" and "indecisiveness," which are, in the first place, the oldest and even strictly genderless denotations of the word "bakla." The popular belief that a bakla child can be un-confused and set a-right by inflicting upon his body acts of parental, typically fatherly, cruelty precisely proves the persistence of earlier meanings even in this day and age of the homosexualized bakla.

After all, what the "moderately nativist" idea of hybridity or syncretism implies is that colonial discursive enforcements, including the psychological, are inevitably refunctioned and translated in the localities they must occupy, where their claims are effectively "sundered" from their performances. In other words, imported colonial concepts become recontextualized and are syncretized from the very moment of contact with the colonized. (Neo)colonial power isn't absolute, hence, inasmuch as it is necessarily fractured and transformed in its relationality with its subjects, over whom it exercises both a coercive and an empowering mystique. The various syncretisms of identities, languages, practices, and images that result from the forceful implementation of colonial categories prove that colonialism's discourse transforms at the same time that it is transformed in the very exercise of its hegemony.

Thus, foreign knowledges and practices never remain self-identical in the colonial setting. As a result, the task of the Filipino cultural critic, as a student of his or her own condition, is really to engage in an interpretive project that will seek to surface the "critical difference," the irreducible specificity—needless to say, the otherness—implicit in even the most "colonial-sounding" Philippine cultural reality. Just now the example that comes to mind is also the most convenient and, presently, the most germane: the Filipino "gay" is not the same as the American "gay," despite or precisely because of the fact that they share the same (neocolonial) marker. The same may be said of the rest of the LGBT signifier itself, which has doubtless turned global, but is localized at each and every particular site it has staked a mostly political/activist claim in.

We may therefore conclude that the sexualization of the Philippines has been far from unproblematic or complete, and local valuations of gender have simply served to hybridize the newly implanted sexual order.[27] Despite the popularly recognized fact that the bakla has sex with the *tunay na lalake* or "straight man," for instance, among the rural and urban poor Filipinos it is only the former who is legitimately homosexualized by the activity. In like manner, the category "bisexual"—as it is used

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in the Philippines—doesn't strictly imply a bisexual object choice, but rather merely denominates a masculine-identified gender presentation on the part of the fully fledged gay man (on the other hand, "lesbian" also tends to be exclusively conflated with the mannish identity of the "tomboy"). What this stubborn *genderization* of concepts of sexuality tells us is that the sexualization of Filipinos, while increasing and expanding in its virulence, has thus far not been entirely uniform or complete. Examining this process more closely, we can see that it has, in fact, often been skewed towards the further stigmatizing of what had already been an undesirable, because minoritized (and minoritizing) identity: for instance, that of the bakla.

By the same token, we may also say that articulations of the gay and/or transgender identity do not simply repeat the colonially inflicted stigma of homosexuality as an immorality and/or an illness, for they can only be vitally informed by and "mixed" with earlier and more local conceptions. In other words, they do not only signify exclusively private and sexual concerns; they may also be seen as instances of postcolonial difference, as sites of discursive subversion and forms of hybridity. This form of postcolonial resistance isn't volitional, but inheres in the structure of colonial domination itself, which is always already translational in its operationality. As Bhabha has persuasively argued it, hybridity is premised on the idea that, from the very beginning, colonialist authority is never fully present or absolute (45); that as experienced by the colonized, it is always already different from its claims to a "natural" originality, truthfulness, and superiority; that there is, in the colonial setting, a radical ambivalence that lies at the heart of imperial power, which in its desire to be acknowledged as powerful has needed to be translated into the local languages and is therefore, precisely in its *translatedness*, irremediably bastardized, hybridized, transformed—needless to say, subverted *from within*. The "gay" and now "transgender" identities, as Filipinos have increasingly come to view, understand, live, and champion them, are as much the ascription of these histories of cross-gender behavior and homosexuality, as the expression of the various syncretic freedoms and desires these selfsame histories have paradoxically conferred.[28]

LGBT Politics in the Philippines

And so, the arrival into the Philippines of LGBT discourse (and its attendant identity effects) will not amount to a complete supersession of its cultures' existing categories for gendered personhood, but will simply demonstrate the same kind of localization/hybridization that any other Western concept necessarily undergoes the moment it finds currency thereabouts. (A limited but useful analogy may be made of the local spring roll or *lumpia*: new and exotic wrapper on the outside, familiar condiments and stuffing on the inside; and yet the *lumpia* is one). We can only be happy that Diño in her TV interviews unapologetically references her bakla childhood. As has been my implicit argument in this attempt to situate LGBT

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discourse within the history of gender and sexuality in the Philippines: narratives of kabaklaan (particularly prepubescent ones) remain and will continue to remain as a "common ground" across the gay, bisexual, and male-to-female transgender identities that must now increasingly emerge from the new global discourse of LGBT politics.

Kabaklaan remains a powerful discourse, a prism through which "GBT" identities are obviously being refracted, a residual ground of new identities in the Philippine corner of globality, which shall continue to haunt or inform them precisely as their founding repudiation. The stigma of kabaklaan has obviously pained and bedeviled so many Filipino bakla, which is why alternative terms and names have been fashioned by Philippine gay culture over the years—*bading* and *becky* are presently the mainstays, and we must admit that, if anything, all this "generativity" as far as self-identificatory labels are concerned is nothing if not encouraging (for it is indicative of an altogether plucky and fabulous agency). "Transgender" and "Bisexual" are arguably also nominal fashionings in this sense, but they are also undeniably different because they represent the arrival of new and non-erotophobic global knowledges that do not only name identities but create them.

To repeat, therefore, the crucial theoretical point: what the performativity of gender and sexuality implies is that, finally, identity is nothing if not a cultural construction. Meaning: that the categories available for understanding our "selves" bring these selves into existence, and it is the repetitive enactment of these categories that creates the illusion of an ontological or foundational subject (which is most certainly not the source, but merely the effect, of this performativity, precisely). Because the category of kabaklaan persists as the primary ascription Filipino society gives to genitally male gender and sexual variance, kabaklaan will continue to be a formative experience, upon which some Filipinos will build, or away from which some of them will turn, and the Philippine LGBT movement is proof of that.

But we must remember that LGBT identity is also just another discursive regime (western in its origins and therefore western in its orientation), with its own repressive mechanisms, blindnesses, biases, and regulatory fictions.[29] In the first place, it is premised upon a kind of sexological consciousness that seems inherently incapable of transcending heternormativity (we must remember that the vaunted depathologizing of male homosexuality was predicated upon the installing of a masculinist norm—the healthy gay man is a masculine man; too bad if he happens to be sissy or "gender-dysophoric"). The translatedness of LGBT politics in the Philippines is something that Filipino LGBTs may not be conscious about, but it makes sense to suggest that they should study this cultural transformation seriously and more self-consciously, if only to have some say in its possible directions and deployments. Secondly, and germane to this initial point, LGBT thinkers in the Philippines need to consider the possibility that they may not need to chuck kabaklaan altogether, seeing as how it's not only a powerful discourse that is certain

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to persist and inform whatever else they can throw at it, but also because, well, it is theirs—a number of them may very well say, despite or precisely because of what they've come to know through their own education in this topic, without batting an eyelash, it is nothing if not them, precisely.

An instructive experience: the first society T-shirt of the University of the Philippines Babaylan, the first officially recognized LGBT student organization in the country (of which I was the founding adviser), came out sometime in the early 1990s; it had the sentence "Bakla ako." ("I'm bakla.") in front, and at the back of the shirt it read: "May angal?" ("Got a problem with that?") From what I can recall, all of the members in this student organization—feminine- or masculine-identified, bisexual, etc.—wore it. It was, needless to say, a powerful reversal of the stigma, precisely because the students who comprised UP Babaylan didn't avoid or replace it. They embraced it and took it by the horns and turned it upside down. This is the same power that the word "queer"—mobilized away from its pejorative signification and turned into an empowering signifier—had in the West in the 1990s. My continuing sense is that LGBT activism in the Philippines needs to do something similar with "bakla," as well. Appropriated in this fashion, "bakla" can be a rallying cry around which a coalition among the identities it imperfectly denominates can form.

On the other hand, there admittedly is an absence of a comparable discursivity as far as *katomboyan* (loosely, "lesbianism") is concerned. While there were arguably indigenous words for "mannish women" in the remote past—the Tagalog *binalake*, for example, and the Visayan *lakin-on*[30]—it remains true that such words have not only failed to gain currency across the centuries, we can also conclude that there's really no equivalent to bakla, per se: a word that didn't start out gendered at all (according to early colonial *vocabularios*, it was the root word for an adjective that denoted a gender-nonspecific state of indecisiveness or fear), was admittedly gendered (as a marker for effeminacy and degrees of male femininity) in the early part of the 20th century, and by the post-War period, slowly but surely became "homosexualized" (although these earlier significations arguably persist as connotations). As we know, bakla describes a rather pervasive and powerful semantic field, and because it is a pejorative term that is popularly used to shame certain kinds of children (usually by children themselves), then this shame continues to provide a central affect around which a sense of self becomes organized.

Precisely because of its globality, LGBT politics offers an enabling set of myths gender-variant and sexually dissident Filipinos have no choice but to embrace. We can only hope that, at the same time that they do this, they will also persevere in interrogating it.

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Notes

1. By virtue of Republic Act No. 9500, promulgated on April 29, 2008, UP was declared as "the national university of the Philippines." The UP System is composed of its existing constituent universities, which are the following: University of the Philippines Diliman; University of the Philippines Manila; University of the Philippines Los Baños; University of the Philippines Visayas; University of the Philippines Mindanao; University of the Philippines Baguio; and University of the Philippines Open University. Diliman, the main campus, leads the way in the promotion of gender-related discourse, being the location of a Center for Women's Studies as well as several Gender Offices.

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2. Born in 1985, Heart Evangelista is a popular television and film actress in the Philippines. She is of Chinese and Filipino roots, and it was from her that Diño drew her "aspirational" name.
3. The career of the term "transgender" (as a signifier for gender diversity and/or gender transitivity) has not exactly been smooth or easy. According to Susan Stryker, after a rather shaky start, and owing largely to the work of Leslie Feinberg, in the 1990s transgender finally became "an umbrella term used to represent a political alliance between all gender-variant people who do not conform to social norms for typical men and women, and who suffer political oppression as a result." She adds that "a great deal of … intellectual work has been carried out under the transgender rubric since the early 1990s. The activist community mobilized through the term [and it] has won human and civil rights protection for various forms of gender atypicality at various governmental levels." See Stryker.
4. It was first used in the Philippines in the 1990s, and since then, it has gained a wider currency. In December 2002, STRAP (Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines) was established by four "transpinays" (transsexual Filipino women). According to its website, STRAP is "the first and only transgender rights and advocacy group in the Philippines," and its mission is "to address the issues, needs and concerns of transsexual/transgender Filipinos and to raise public awareness on issues of gender identity and expression." See http://www.tsphilippines.com/aboutstrap.htm (accessed 12 Feb. 2012).
5. A previously "innocuous" Tagalog word, bakla has come to signify, over the last 50 years, ideas of effeminacy, male-to-female transvestism, and homosexuality. For comparable studies on how the term bakla has moved from gender to sexuality, and has come to denote feminized (male) homosexuality in more recent times, see Tan; Manalansan.
6. Cendaña was elected president of the Central Student Council of the University of the Philippines (Diliman) in 1997. He is currently an official (a "commissioner-at-large") of the National Youth Commission, which is under the office of the President of the Republic of the Philippines. See "Percival Vilar Cendaña."
7. For a longer explanation of these four "gender identities," see "Knowledge, Sexuality, and the Nation-state" in Garcia, Performing the Self 3-31.
8. By now a theoretical commonsense, the notion of "gender performativity" is still proving difficult to promote in the Philippines, where religion continues to play a significant role in the public sphere. This can be proven by the fact—among others—that a rudimentary reproductive health bill continues to languish in the legislature, owing to the powerful lobby being waged against it by the Roman Catholic church (to whom the vast majority of Filipinos still belong). For an examination of the presuppositions of this theory (articulated most powerfully by the feminist philosopher, Judith Butler), as well as an attempt to contextualize it within Philippine studies, see Garcia, "Performativity" 265-81.
9. For a longer version of this history, see part one of Garcia, Philippine Gay Culture 39-275.

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10. These are all culturally comparable words for "effeminate homosexual" among the Philippines's Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilonggo, and Tausug ethnic communities, respectively.
11. See, for instance, studies on the Thai kathoey and the Indonesian waria: Jackson; Oetomo.
12. The more important of these Spanish colonial accounts about indigenous "gender crossing" in the Philippines include: Alcina, qtd. in Cullamar 18; Ribadeneira; Perez; Plasencia; Morga; Combes 150; "The Manners, Customs, and Beliefs" 374-75; Chirino 260; and San Antonio.
13. For a fairly lucid and "nationalistic" explication of the babaylan role and its relationship to the concept of femininity in early colonial Philippines, see Salazar.
14. I use the term "gender-crossing" in comparable senses to how Harriet Whitehead uses it in her study of the Amerindian berdache. See Whitehead.
15. Contemporary Filipino feminists have eagerly pointed this out in their studies. For the most forceful of these, see Mananzan.
16. We find the word for a diminutive species of bamboo, bayog, and the word for "womanish man," hombre afeminado (bayoguin), already in one of the earliest vocabularies printed during the Spanish colonial period. See San Buenaventura.
17. The more popular Spanish-Tagalog dictionaries where non-sexual, ungendered definitions of the word "bakla" may be found are: Noceda and Sanlucar 49; and Laktaw 131.
18. Evidence of the existence of this perception may be gleaned from Filipino folk literature. See, for instance, a certain class of riddles coming from a number of Philippine languages that connects the personage of the fully garbed colonial priest with feminine cross-dressing. See Eugenio 567-68.
19. My sense is that, among other things, what facilitated this process of sexualization was the existence, among the Tagalog-Filipinos especially, of a "psychospiritual" discourse of gendered interiority and exteriority: namely, loob and labas. For a cogent explanation of this concept of the sexually defined "inner self," see Alejo. For my own analysis of the loob/labas dynamic, especially as it figures in the history of homosexuality in the Philippines, see Garcia, Philippine Gay Culture 120-30.
20. For a discussion of this point, see Garcia, Philippine Gay Culture, specifically the chapter on precolonial gender-crossing and the babaylan chronicles, 151-97.
21. For an explanation of the medieval concept of "sodomy," see Boswell 349.
22. It is interesting to note, in this respect, that most if not all the accounts that allude to sodomy during the Spanish colonial period blame its existence in the colony on the Sangleyes or the merchant Chinese. For an interesting "theory" for why this was so, see Phelan 186-87.
23. According to queer scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in almost all public patriarchal cultures, male homosociality and male homosexuality cannot be assumed to be entirely different things, especially given fact that, as patriarchy itself decrees, men must promote each other's interests as men, precisely at the

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expense of women, who are often merely "devices" for them to bond with each other. See Sedgwick.

24. For a representative anthology of the best essentialist and constructionist arguments (regarding the issue of sexual orientation), coming from philosophers and social scientists alike, see Stein.
25. It was from this perspective—of a "moderate nativism"—that I framed the conceptual paradigm of my study. For a more detailed discussion of the difference this position makes to the examination of the history of homosexuality in the Philippines, see Garcia, Philippine Gay Culture xi-xxv.
26. Parry actually begs for a distinction to be critically drawn between nativism as essentialism and nativism as necessary and enabling myth, and uses Negritude as an example. See Parry.
27. I limned the contours of these histories of gender and sexual "hybridity" in Philippine gay culture in my essay, Garcia, "Villa, Montano, Perez."
28. A more thorough examination of hybridity as resistance, in the works of a selection of Filipino gay writers, is what I carry out in my unabridged critical essay, Garcia, "Postcolonial Resistance."
29. In a manner of speaking, it is these Asian-specific appropriations and localizations of the "LGBT" (and, to a lesser extent, the "queer") signifier that is the central theme of the critical anthology Asiapacifiqueer, eds. Martin et al. In different essays, scholars from Asia and Australia rethink Western concepts of gender and sexuality as these are understood and operationalized in various cultural locations in the region.
30. An ethnography of the Cebuano bayot, written in the 1970s, minimally touches on the lakin-on ("mannish lesbian") of Dumaguete City (on Negros island, in the southern Philippines). See Ponteñila. Needless to say, there is a marked paucity of studies on "lesbian" identities in the Philippines.

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